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DEPT FOR AIT/W, EAP/TC, INR/EAP

FROM AIT KAOHSIUNG BRANCH OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL TW

SUBJECT: Kaohsiung College Students Interested in Politics and Upcoming Taiwan Presidential Election

¶1. (U) Summary: Student interviewees told AIT/K that southern Taiwan's youth are interested in politics and view the 2008 presidential election as an opportunity to make their voices heard through the ballot box. The students expressed concern about corruption and the shortage of high-paying job prospects and suggested greater cross-Straight opening would improve Taiwan's economy. They stressed the need for increased government transparency, an unbiased media, and an independent judiciary to strengthen Taiwan's democracy. End summary.

¶2. (U) During a recent series of interviews with AIT/K, groups of students from Wenzao Ursuline College and Sun Yat-sen University expressed strong dissatisfaction with Taiwan's current DPP government. Relatively well informed on domestic and international politics, the students generally agreed that much change is needed for Taiwan to become a mature democracy. Young KMT and DPP supporters alike perceived the economy as being in decline and blamed the Chen administration for the dearth of well-paying jobs. The students suggested that increased cooperation with China and establishing direct transportation links would improve Taiwan's economy.

¶3. (U) The students voiced concern about corruption and the intense rivalry between political parties. They favored increased government transparency, an unbiased media, and an independent judiciary. Most felt that the 2008 presidential election would present an opportunity for the younger generation to promote political reform. A number of students told AIT/K that they plan to vote for candidates who are in favor of greater opening toward Mainland China.

¶4. (U) The students named a variety of venues through which they are able to voice their concerns and play a role in politics. Many students said they contribute to their university newspapers and some join political parties to push for specific issues. Still others initiate political discussions in the classroom and hone their political awareness by joining international conferences or student leadership camps. They told us that a growing number of students are interested in pursuing careers in government, some for job security, but others hoping to work in government to try to promote change. Wenzao and Sun Yat-sen students unanimously agreed that voting is the easiest and most effective way for young people to be heard in Taiwan, and they expressed hope that their peers will turn out at the polls.

¶5. (U) Comment: Taiwan's younger generation (ages 20-28), which makes up about 16% of the population, has the potential to significantly impact the 2008 presidential elections. However, despite expressing a desire to vote, young voters often do not show

up at the ballot box on Election Day. End comment.

Thiele

Young